

# **SKELETONS IN CLOSETS & DARK CLOUDS OVERHEAD**

(From the Summer 2002 LW Newsletter)

Inevitable outcome of sexual brokenness and our failure to keep sexual boundaries, are the skeletons we keep in a closet and the foreboding clouds which hang over us. Things we've done on impulse. Or, like the frog, oblivious in slowly heating water, we've muddled around, playing with sin, getting deeper, allowing it to lure us to the boiling point of utter shame and degradation. How we wish we hadn't done those things! How we feel that our very life has been tainted because of our foolish action. We've lost respect for ourselves, and if others only knew, they'd lose respect too.

Our betrayal could thrust a wound so deep in a loved one that would cause them untold suffering. It could mean the loss of a marriage, a family, a job, the hope of living life with dignity. Freedom has been sacrificed. We can never be fully ourselves with others because of the skeleton in the cupboard.

It seems worse in the Christian community because we've lived externally upholding the standards, but internally our minds have been a quagmire and our compulsive dirty habits have been hidden. To come out in the open would be to let others down, a shame too great for us to live with, and even an admission that the gospel of Jesus is not as powerful as we've proclaimed it to be.

We are faced with a dilemma: do we tell or keep quiet? The latter is no option at all. There is risk both ways. It's the risk of laying hold of the depth of the gospel, and proving its truth and power. Or it's the risk of living in mediocrity, of continuing to live a Christianity which is veneer and sham. Pretending to be someone whom we are not, and never discovering the depths of the mercy, forgiveness, freedom and restoring power of the Cross of Jesus.

Confession is never a matter of exposing a wanting quality in the gospel of Jesus, but rather the road to discovering, and proving, the overwhelming fullness of its power. The kind of confession of which the Scripture speaks is never a lone event. 1 John 1:9 promises that confession elicits God's just and faithful heart. But v7 which precedes it calls us to walk in light as Jesus exudes light. To walk in darkness is to keep the skeleton in the closet, to maintain the sham or to entertain the secret life.

But to walk in the light is to open up, honestly, transparently and courageously. It's to speak it into the community of saints. To go to the mature brother or sister who knows how to exercise spiritual authority, and release God's abundant forgiveness and cleansing so that your conscience is made clear, your spirit is enlivened unto life and you have some wise guidance as to how to both work out and walk out your repentance.

James speaks of confessing our sins to one another, and praying for each other so that we will be healed.(5:16)

Skeletons in the closet come from a condition which needs healing. The deep inner need for body connection, the inability to keep boundaries, a fascination with broken sexuality, sexual compulsions or addictions, be they hetero or homosexual,

acted out, or fantasy, all arise from a diseased soul. This diseased soul desperately needs healing. It is in confessing into the community of saints where righteous prayer can be offered, that releases grace for healing, deep in the soul. Healing which enables the sinner to grow in intimacy with God, to regain freedom, dignity, fullness of life and grace to do the good works to which He has destined you.

But there's still the issue of the consequences. What we sow we reap. God rarely removes the consequences. That has to do with His justice. But He does pour out a humongous grace to enable us and the innocent who have been affected, to work consequences through. Such is the nature of His mercy and love for us. Still, we must first face the terrors of the possibilities:

- How deep will the pain wound those who have been betrayed?
- How will I cope with the pain of being exposed?
- What unknown giant will I unleash here?
- To what extent am I casting my future beyond my control?
- Will I be able to bear the consequences, punishment, justice, shame, others' disillusionment & distancing?

To speak out will force me to face my own weaknesses, self hatred, immaturity, evil nature, selfishness, and I'm not sure I would be able to bear that.

On the other hand these possibilities also need to be considered:

- Your partner's intuition of your sin, and your walling off from trust and intimacy because of it, will place a sadness in her/his heart and in turn a probable closing off from you. Set the slate clean! Skeletons have a habit of breaking out of the most carefully guarded closet. Will it be better for the betrayed to be entrusted with the confession now, by your courageous free choice, or to find out later?
- Will the ultimate hurt of not being told be worse? A question to be considered here is: Is there a brokenness in your partner, where you know that he/she would prefer not to know? In which case the next question is: Would the Lord use your disclosure as a catalyst for her to face her/his own denial or brokenness?
- Though the relationship would suffer initially would the nature of your mutual trust and intimacy ultimately be increased?
- Will getting away with it reinforce your deceit, leading to the possibility of offending again, or lead to covering over other areas of sin and compromise?
- What is the value of integrity, and how will you re-establish it in your life?
- Accountability which necessarily follows confession is a powerful tool to overcome personal weaknesses and flaws, in every area of life
- Is there any physical danger arising from your non-disclosure? Eg STDs etc
- Secrets foreclose on your emotional, communicative and even mental presence with your spouse/others. How freeing will it be for you to be able to look them in the eye?!!
- How long can you live with yourself in keeping the secret? It takes an immense amount of emotional energy! (you don't realise until the dust settles after confession and you're freed from the huge weight of the bundle you've finally dropped!)

Back to that humongous grace! God's mercy triumphs over judgement! He is bigger than any giant your confession may unleash. He looks for people of

integrity, people who will call sin, SIN, and who will open up the inevitable wickedness of their heart in transparent honesty to Him. He took into account that we would slip up, even take a mammoth slide to habitual sin. That's why He provided the Cross and the grace of confession.

That's why His word says that if we say that we have not sinned we are a liar. That's why it speaks of restoring the fallen gently. That's why He says that if we overcome the pride of secrecy, which He resists, and humble ourselves before Him He will give immense grace to us and lift us back up when He knows the time is right. An essential way of knowing the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings and conformity to his death is exposing the secret strongholds of sin in the heart, and dying to them through the humility of open confession.

Not that God wants us to publish our sin for the whole world to read. He honours the one who covers his brother's nakedness. Confession of sin is to be discreet, confidential to the confessor and worked out with those it has betrayed or directly affected. We don't need to fear that it will get out of control because God is the One who is in control and He is able to hold that which we commit to Him, bringing it to perfection on the Day when we meet Him. To lay hold of the grace of the Cross in this essential manner is to receive deeper revelation of its power. It is to enter much deeper friendship with Jesus, to receive the grace of His blood cleansing our conscience. It is to choose to face justice now, rather than later. It is to be courageous. It is to turn the things we have been sowing unto death, and cause them to be seeds unto righteousness. It is to experience God who causes all things to work for good, taking even our most shameful, despicable sin and turning it into manure from which He brings forth a most beautiful and fruitful tree.

Certainly this purging and transforming will be painful, but once the process is worked through it will yield fruit of righteousness. To avoid the issue is initially less painful, but it remains that ominous cloud above your head, separating you from God, others and from your true self. A cloud waiting to burst its still more painful judgement on you. But God wants you to respond, not from the fear of judgement but because He woos you with His love and promise. God most of all wants your love, Love from a clean heart, love which no longer mocks Him by presuming on His grace, but relies upon Him by believing His gospel and acting on it, confessing sin, casting it into His Cross, walking in light, receiving forgiveness and cleansing, body, soul and spirit.

This enables us to experience the depths of true fellowship. It enriches friendship and relationship with one another. Because friendships become based on the fellowship of the Cross, the fellowship of those who know they have been forgiven through Jesus, the fellowship of those who know they have received unmerited mercy and the deep love, affection and affirmation of God their Father, poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit who fills them! God will do it for both sinner and sinned against, as He pours out grace to confess and grace to forgive.

I offer this article, borne out of my own experience. Most of my life I was unable to share the homosexual drive within. I let it gradually drive me to pornography, then liaisons with men. Dark secrets were shut up in my soul. My life became unmanageable and my ministry as a pastor utterly white-anted and damaging to many. Confession and the ensuing journey of healing was the light that led me out of a very foreboding tunnel.

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